



# **On the Events of Central Darfur State - al-Hasaheesa Camp**

**Joint Report**  
Hikayat Project  
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**October 2024**

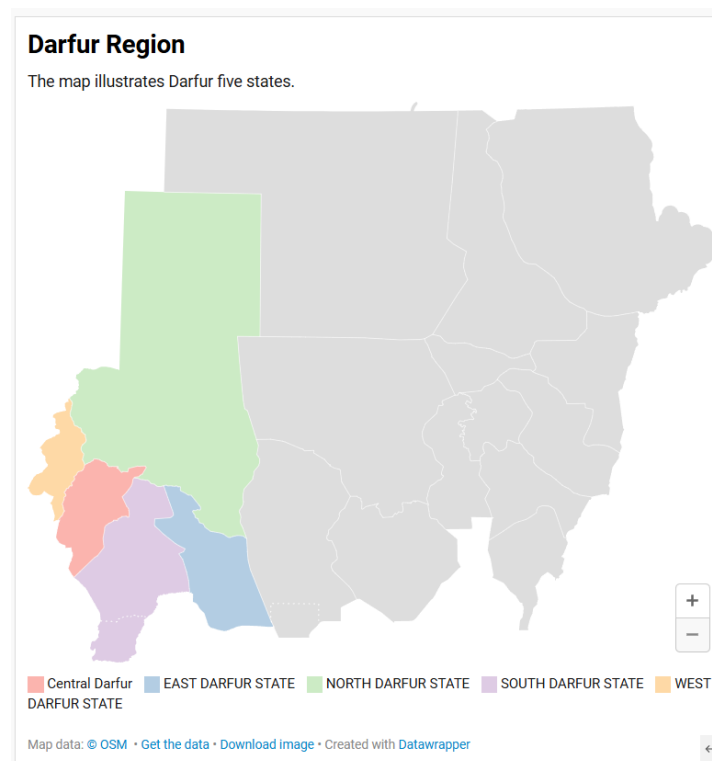


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## Historical Background

The eruption of the conflict in the states of Darfur in western Sudan in 2003 between armed groups (Sudan's Liberation Movement/Army and the Justice and Equality Movement) and the Sudanese Army and its different proxies and allied armed groups - then- like the Rapid Support Forces and its allied militias "the Janjaweed"<sup>1</sup>, led to a huge humanitarian crisis, both parties committed crimes against civilians, that resulted in the displacement of 2.5 million of the population according to the United Nations and a large scale destruction of villages where around 200,000 deaths were recorded most of which due to diseases related to the conflict and malnutrition. The conflict attracted the interest of the international community, and prompted humanitarian interventions by the United Nations and the African Union, moreover the International Criminal Court brought charges against some Sudanese officials like Omer al-Bashir (the former president), Ali Muhammad AbdAlrahman (known as Ali Kushib, the commander of the Janjaweed militias in Wadi Salih), Ahmed Haroun (former Interior Minister) and Abdalrahim Muhammad Hussein (former Defense Minister) where the charges brought against them ranged from war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.



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1: armed groups presented as an auxiliary force for the army

Despite the signing of a number of peace agreements, starting with the N'djamena Agreement 2004, followed by Abuja 2006 and Doha 2011 Agreements and the Juba Agreement in 2020, however the conflict did not end completely. The region continued to suffer from instability and constant conflicts, the region went through -and continues to go through- repeated humanitarian crises represented in crimes against humanity committed against civilians and crimes of ethnic cleansing. The citizens of Darfur went through repeated displacement crises, insecurity, an acute shortage of services in the area, and repeated patterns of violations.

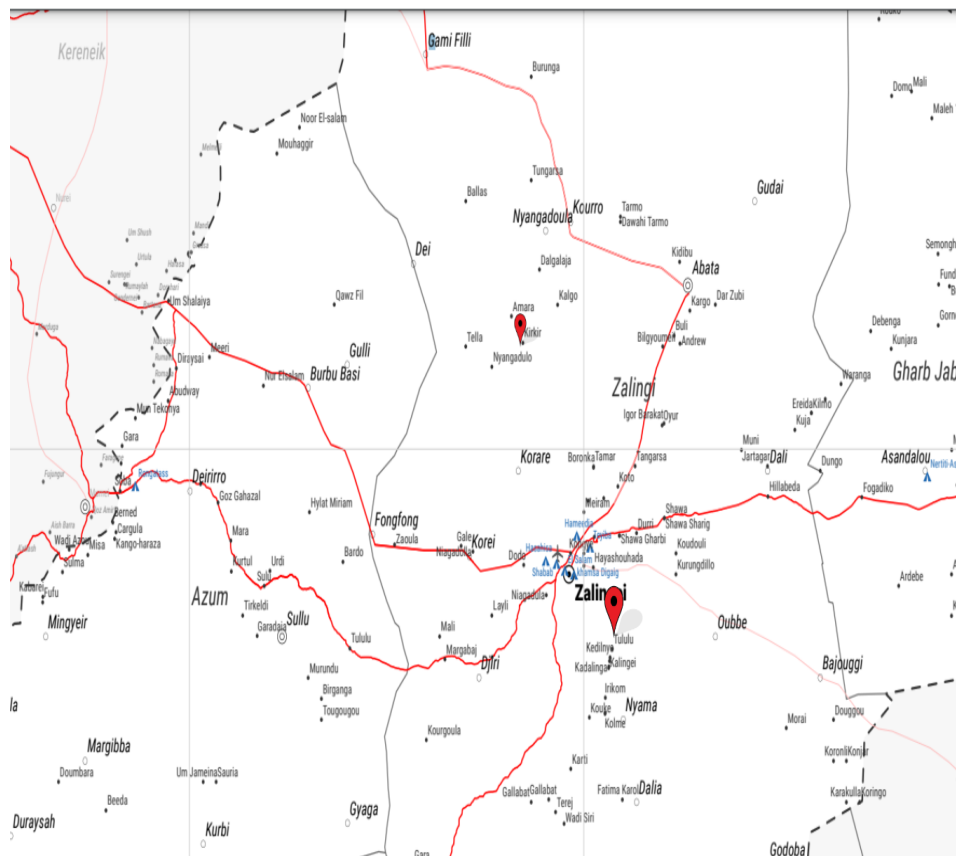
## The Historical Context of al-Hasaheesa camp, Central Darfur

Al-Hasaheesa camp was established at the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004 in Central Darfur state, in the western part of Zalingei city, the camp lies at 600 meters from the first outpost of the city's army base and 1.6 kilometers from the gate of the 21st Infantry Division of Zalengi, and it lies at a distance of one kilometer from the city center. The number of internally displaced persons in the camp is estimated around 50,000 people.



*A map designed by the verification team of Matmoora's Project on 25/9/2024 showing the distance between al-Hasaheesa camp in Central Darfur and the 21st Infantry Division Zalingei.*

Since the beginning of the Darfur crisis in 2003 and the escalation of the armed conflict, displacement towards the camp started from several villages in Zalingei city, the capital of Central Darfur. Where displacement to the camp's direction was from the western villages like Kono, Tolulu Barki, Kangi, Kargola, Arjanaga, Marngo and Markbaj, and from the northern direction like the villages of Korkoum, Karar and al-Ebeideya, and the Southern direction like Kogy and Deim Orteinj and others of the different villages whose residents were affected by the armed conflict in 2003 between the Sudanese Army with the direct support of the Janjaweed militias and the armed movements of Darfur states.



Map source: UNOCHA, the map shows the neighboring villages of Zalingei city from all directions.

At the beginning of the crisis, internally displaced persons went through harsh conditions to adjust to camp life. One of the most difficult challenges that internally displaced persons faced were the economic challenges related to providing a living where most people worked in selling firewood and coal.

Apart from the deteriorating humanitarian conditions, camp residents also endured food crises that resulted in multiple deaths due to malnutrition and food shortage. In spite of the huge rise in unemployment since displacement started due to the instability of the security situation, however, the situation relatively stabilized later, which provided some opportunities to restabilize the economic and social life of internally displaced persons. People were able to rebuild their lives gradually, where the labour market regained its activity and children returned to schools, which contributed to achieving a relative stability of varying levels, according to the local conditions.

## **The War of April 15th 2023**

Since the start of the conflict between the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Army on the 15th of April 2023 in the capital, Khartoum, and the expansion of the conflict to the different states of Sudan, of the states to which the conflict extended to are the states of the Darfur region. As was mentioned in the introduction of this report, Darfur is known for its long history of conflict and instability which started in 2003.

With the changing alignments of the different warring parties in the conflict (where the Sudanese Army was an ally of the Rapid Support Forces in fighting the armed movements in Darfur while now some of these armed movements are allied with the Sudanese Army in the fight against the Rapid Support Forces in the same regions), the data shows that the only constant during these different conflicts is the suffering of Darfur citizens with repeated patterns of violations, war crimes and displacement crises and the associated social and economic hardships. This report seeks to answer the question of what happened in al-Hasaheesa camp in Central Darfur state within the period of the eruption of the war on the 15th of April 2023 and the day in which the 21st Infantry Division of Zalingei fell on the 31st of October 2023 at the hands of the Rapid Support Forces after it was under the control of the Sudanese Army.





Satellite image taken on the 24th of July 2024 by the verification team of Matmoora's Project, which shows the headquarters of the 21st Infantry Division via Google Earth. The video footage shows the shared data of the two images, where the first picture shows one of the Rapid Support Forces soldiers in the official uniform standing in front of a sign that reads "Command of the 21st Infantry Division" and it is a screenshot taken on 24/6/2024 from a video that was published on X platform by the "Electronic Deterrence" page on 31/10/2023. The screenshot also shows the distinct landmarks like the extended electric wires and the trees in the background. As for the second image, it is a satellite image that shows the match between the landmarks of the 21st Infantry Division and the screenshot of the video footage through comparing the similarities in the original source and the maps.



Screenshot taken by the verification team of Matmoora's Project on 14/10/2024 from a video that was published by the "Rapid News" page on X platform on 31/10/2023.



*The screenshots above show a rough analysis of the uniform, where the first (uniform of the spokesperson of the Rapid Support Forces) and the second (uniform of one of the soldiers in front of the headquarters) bear similarities of which is the sign of the Rapid Support Forces on the right side of the uniform, in addition to the badge on the left side.*

Also, the report focuses on the preceding events, like the siege on the area, specifically the week that preceded the fall of the 21st Infantry Division. It is important to note that al-Hasaheesa camp lies close to the headquarters of the 21st Infantry Division of Zalingei, and it is exactly the area on which a siege was imposed from the 26th of September to the 31st of October by the Rapid Support Forces. The report seeks to:

1. Document and understand the effects of this siege on internally displaced persons in al-Hasaheesa camp;
2. Show the consequences of the attack on the 21st Infantry Division and after that on the camp, and the crimes that were committed during the attack and on the displacement route from the camp to different areas;
3. Document the conditions of internally displaced persons in dwellings and shelters where they currently reside, in addition to evaluating the economic and security conditions there.



## Research Methodology

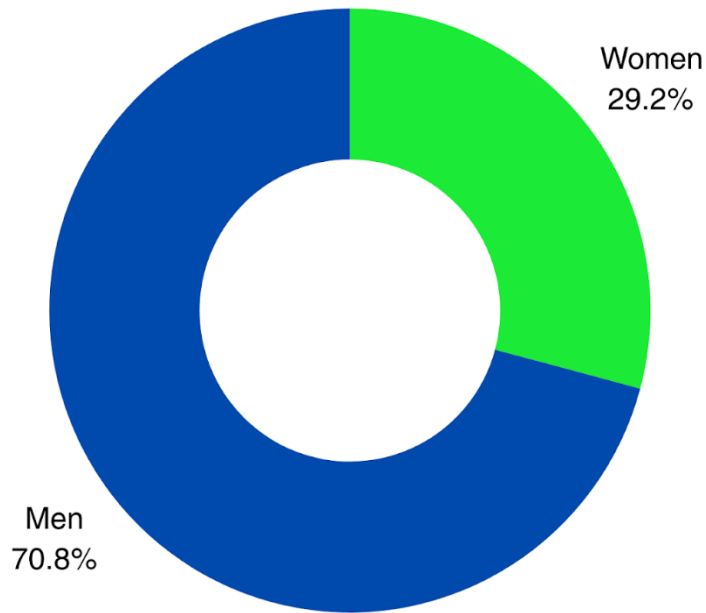
The research uses closed sources (interviews conducted by the team of Hikayat Project on the ground in collaboration with Adeela Organization) and open sources as primary tools for data collection, it also uses different mechanisms to verify and analyze them. The information mentioned in the interviews is verified through comparing their consistency with each other, and their consistency with information collected from several external forces.

The data is analyzed in two ways: first, descriptive methodology and content analysis. When following this methodology interviews are carried out, and after that they are encrypted, transcribed, and qualitative data is carefully analyzed to understand the events accurately. And upon verification -as previously mentioned- the method of cross-checking information is used in interviews to obtain the most recurring narratives when comparing the different interviews. Furthermore, the interviews texts and rhetoric form are analyzed with the purpose of identifying the recurring patterns, topics, themes or meanings pertaining to the event of the military offensive on al-Hasaheesa camp. While the second method is analyzing the social and political contexts of the area and verifying the geographical and time-related details. In addition to the aforementioned, the open source data team collects different available information on the Internet and verifies them using precise standardized methods that ensure the accumulation of more credible information.

## Closed Sources

The team conducted 24 audio interviews with those affected by the incident of the military offensive on al-Hasaheesa camp divided as follows:

- 17 interviews with men.
- 7 interviews with women.



Within these interviews that targeted internally displaced persons from al-Hasaheesa camp, there are interviews with:

- An interview with a military personnel of the Armed Forces.
- An interview with one of the administrative leaders of the camp.
- An interview with a humanitarian work activist.

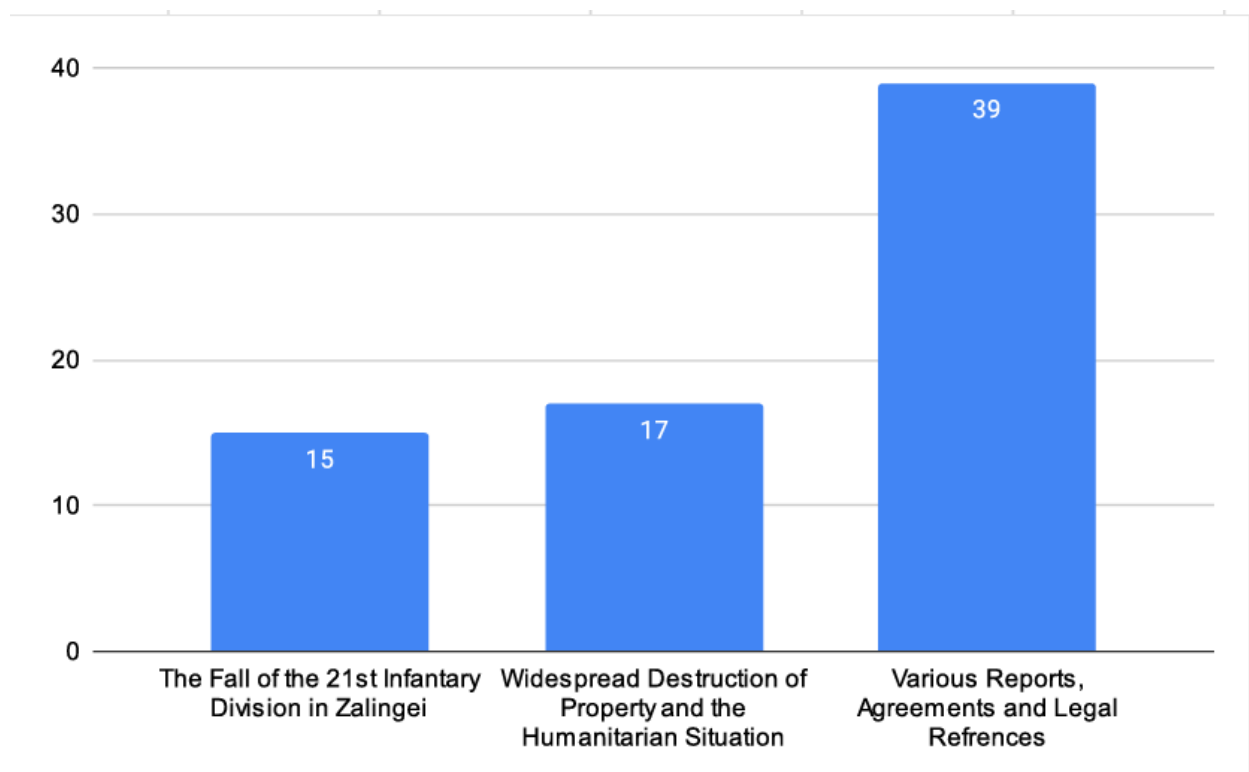
The team followed standard steps and principles in conducting human rights violations' interviews like informed consent, trauma-informed approach, and the basic concepts in the processes of conducting interviews. The questions contained different tabulations related to understanding the context and documenting what happened in the duration of the military siege, the attack, the displacement route and the current economic, humanitarian and social conditions in the different displacement and refugee camps . After conducting the interviews, the available data was qualitatively analyzed to expose the committed human rights violations in the incident of the military offensive on al-Hasaheesa camp, in addition to identifying their potential perpetrators.

## Open Sources

### Monitoring

Through monitoring the available open sources on the Internet and the careful tracing of what took place in Central Darfur state during the military offensive on al-Hasaheesa camp, the open source research team monitored 71 links of videos and images pertaining to different periods of this incident (like the fall of the 21st Infantry Division, the displacement route, the camp siege, the large scale destruction of properties and the humanitarian situation in the state), in addition to reports and legal references that were monitored through Google's Advanced Search. The monitored data were divided as follows:

1. 15 links on the fall of the 21st Infantry Division Zalingei and the camp siege were monitored on X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook platforms.
2. 17 links on the large-scale destruction of properties and the humanitarian situation were monitored on X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook platforms.
3. 39 links about different reports, agreements and legal references were monitored through Google's Advanced Search.



Based on the standards of open source investigation in collecting data, the process begins by specifying clear goals to evaluate the situation and the unfolding events and identifying affected areas, and identifying trusted sources like news reports from non-governmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations and media organizations (like Doctors Without Borders, the United Nations, Al-Jazeera and others), social media platforms (like X <sup>2</sup>, Facebook and Telegram using the advanced search tools on these platforms. Some of these processes include: using the search bar on Facebook to search for certain keywords, using quotation marks to search for specific sentences and words in search engines, using the search bar on Telegram to find channels or groups related to a particular incident, or using the advanced search of X (formerly Twitter) through specifying the dates, locations, and the language of the posts, in addition to searching via hashtags to find the relevant content.

After that, the data was collected and saved in tables and databases designed specifically for this purpose. It also underwent a continuous cleaning process to monitor the changes and the ongoing updates. After cleaning the data, it was archived to maintain it.

## Verification

Finally, after the completion of the archiving process and ensuring the completion of the data quality, the different events like the fall of the 21st Infantry Division and the attack on al-Hasaheesa camp were verified.

To examine the credibility and accuracy of the data the research team took strict measures according to the standards of open sources verification, which included the following elements:

1. Context Analysis: A comprehensive evaluation process that aims at understanding the context of the historical, social, cultural and ethnic conditions surrounding the event.
2. Source verification: here the persons/parties that uploaded the content in question on the Internet are verified and evaluated to ensure the validity of its use within the research, and to evaluate the neutrality of the source and the effects of potential biases on the credibility and objectivity of the presented information.

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2: formerly Twitter

3. Geographic location verification: in this step landmarks are identified in the sources whose geographical location can be determined by using Google Maps and Google Earth. Also a reverse search process is carried out to verify the validity of the data and match images/videos with primary sources. Finally, fire sites are analyzed by using NASA maps in order to verify the existence of fires in targeted areas and their duration.
4. Verification of date and time: here the metadata of videos are examined to know the time of recording the video and verify the match between its date of publication and the actual date of event. A process of shadow analysis was also conducted for selected screenshots from videos chosen for verification to estimate the probable time of the event with the provision of comprehensive information about the sun's position and the different stages of its light and the length of shadows for a specific location and time. Furthermore, the solar trajectory was analyzed, considering the sunrise, solar noon, and sunset, as well as its direction, altitude, and shadow length at specific times and locations to determine the actual timing of the event.
5. Verification of the identity of the potential perpetrators: in this step, the identity of the perpetrators and the responsible parties is verified through an analysis of the official uniform, the statements issued by official authorities, in addition to comparing sources with the similar results of the reverse search in the area of research interest.



## Results

### Al-Hasaheesa Camp Siege

With the renewal of conflict on April 15th 2023, a new wave of displacement of citizens in the areas surrounding the camp started, where almost 50,000 internally displaced persons lived there since the beginning of the conflict in 2003. As the conflict started to expand to Central Darfur, al-Hasaheesa camp was one of the areas least affected by the fighting, hence people from areas like Konjumeya, al-Muhafezein, Dardag and al-Shabab camp fled to it, leading to a significant population increase in the camp. One of the witnesses spoke estimating the increase, saying:

*"I mean, the number came to increase to around 2000 families, of which are 1000 children, 1200 women and 800 men. Yes, of course, people came from different neighborhoods from al-Estad, from al-Estad the al-Hasaheesa city, Konjumeya, al-Muhafezein, Dardag and al-Shabab camp. This was in April 2023."*

This increase directly impacted services, leading to a shortage in the provision of water and food. The prices of food commodities in the markets rose, further exacerbating the suffering of the displaced people.

Obtaining water required transporting it on wooden carts pulled by donkeys, known locally as "Karro". Trade activities included the movement of goods like onions, firewood and coal. Additionally, women were involved in selling beans and tea within the camp during the siege period.

At the beginning of September 2023, the Rapid Support Forces started its siege of al-Hasaheesa Camp from three different directions: the west, east and north. It is worth mentioning that movement outside the camp was associated with multiple dangers like looting, robbery, arrest and even killing by those forces. The danger was even greater for women as they were vulnerable to the crimes of sexual and gender-based violence as well.

### The characteristics of the siege on al-Hasaheesa Camp

1. Imposing a siege on the camp and the surrounding areas and preventing internally displaced persons from exiting outside the territories of the camp and denying them the freedom to move.

2. Repeated artillery shelling by the Rapid Support Forces on the camp due to its proximity to the Division of the Armed Forces leading to a number of casualties. In the investigation we could not ascertain the nature of the shelling: was it targeting the camp or was it because of its presence near the military division? However, what is certain from reviewing the interviews is that the Rapid Support Forces accused the residents of the camp of supporting the Sudanese Army, and that the shelling was indiscriminate in a way that did not take civilian facilities into consideration.
3. Difficulties in burying bodies outside the camp in cemeteries due to the restriction of movement from and to the camp, in addition to the risk in movement as well, artillery shelling by the Rapid Support Forces continued for long periods in the days preceding the offensive on the camp. Some of the locals had to bury the bodies of their families inside their homes to avoid these risks.
4. The blockade of essential goods such as food, medicine and other basic services to the camp which led to a significant increase in malnutrition rates and resulted in several deaths among children and the elderly. One of the administrative leaders of the camp spoke describing the situation:  
*"The Rapid Support Forces and their leaders in Zalingei are the ones who imposed the siege on al-Hasaheesa camp. It was a complete and total siege; they destroyed everything: first, the water sources, the water pumps from the Wadi Azum area, they burned them all, removed the cables, and completely disabled the water supply. There's no water. In al-Hasaheesa camp, the entire groundwater system is unusable, and the pumps can't access it. People used to rely on rainwater, but even the water in the tanks can't reach the camp. It's even harder than that; a pound of sugar couldn't enter the al-Hasaheesa camp. No food was allowed into the camp".*
5. An almost complete halt of trade and exchange to and from the camp.
6. Any person who wandered outside the territories of the camp was vulnerable to several risks like robbery, looting, physical and sexual assault, arrest, torture or being compelled to pay fines and confiscation of transport means like "tok tok"<sup>3</sup> Violations like these are classified as crimes against humanity, specially torture, imprisonment and restriction of movement.

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3: A three-wheeled vehicle used mainly to transport vegetables, it has other uses like being a transport vehicle.

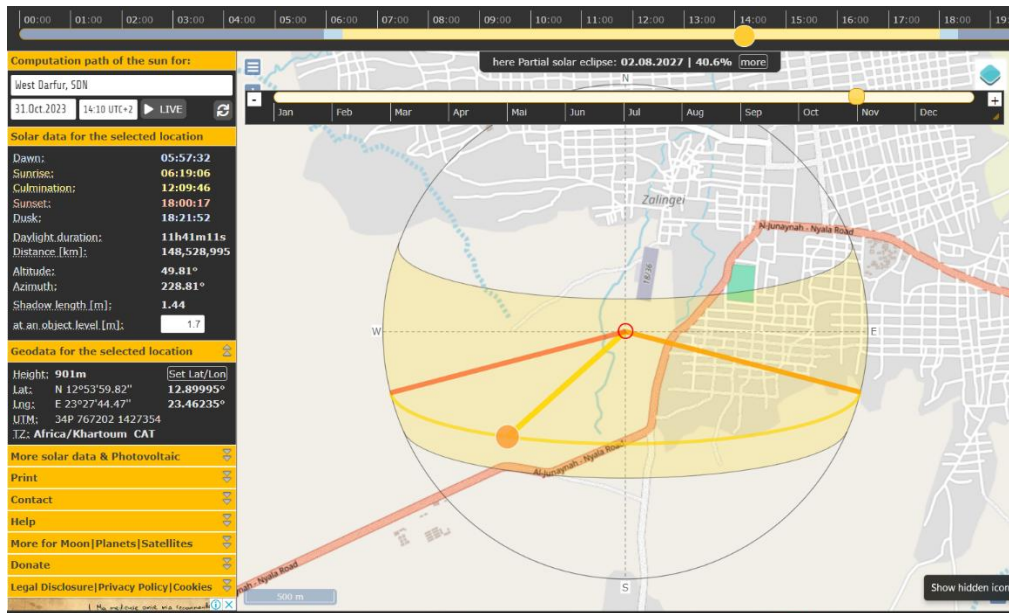
7. Sexual violence crimes: abduction and sexual slavery against women and children during their movement to search for food or livelihood means - and they are considered as crimes against humanity.
8. The blockade of medical supplies and healthcare materials to the camp, along with the prevention of residents from moving the injured or sick to seek medical help, caused a deterioration in public health rates (especially among women, children, and those with chronic illnesses). As a result, the number of deaths from various diseases increased, in addition to those affected by artillery shelling.
9. Deterioration in the basics of reproductive health for women and noticeable hardships for pregnant and nursing women due to the lack of healthcare and food.
10. The looting of Zalengei's Big Market exacerbated the hardships of obtaining staple commodities, additionally remarking that citizens were prevented from movement outside the camp, while those who go out resort to sneaking through a route that is thought to be less dangerous.



Satellite image taken on 25/9/2024 by the verification team of Matmoora's Project, the image shows Zalengei's Big Market.

## The Fall of the 21st Infantry Division and the Attack on al-Hasaheesa Camp

The offensive on al-Hasaheesa Camp and the command of the 21st Infantry Division started at noon on the 30th of October 2023, where violent artillery shelling according to statements of witnesses lasted from 3 o'clock in the afternoon until the morning of the 31st of October.

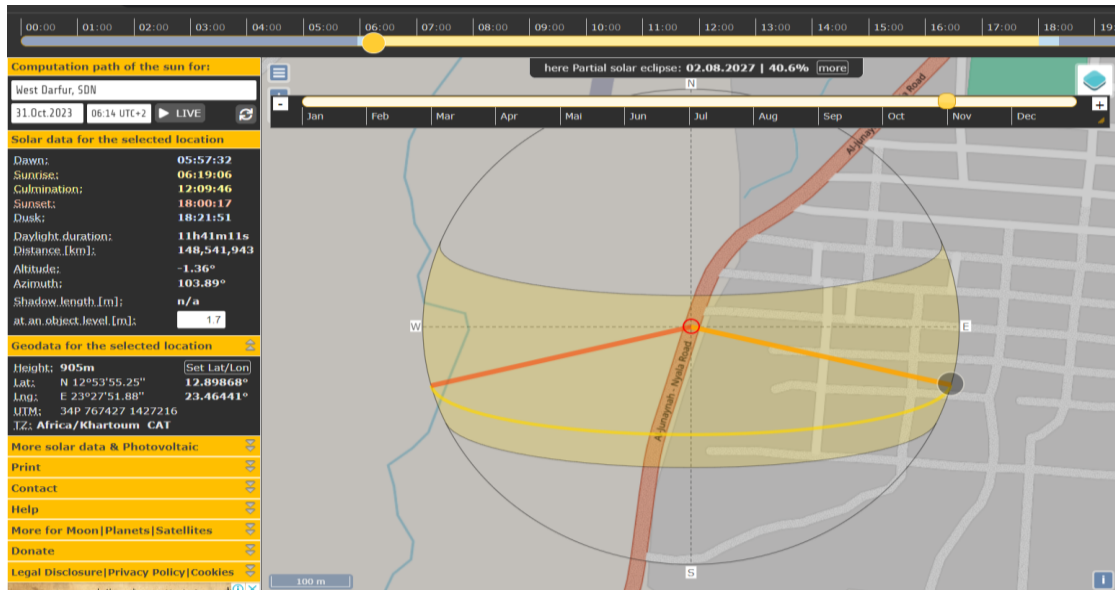


Satellite image taken on 15/10/2024 by the verification team of Matmoora's Project. The image shows a shadow analysis of the image above for one of the Rapid Support Forces soldiers in front of the 21st Infantry Division of Zalingei. Here the data shows comprehensive information about the time of the event according to the Sun's position on the 31st of October. The image shows that the time of Sunrise was around 6:10-6:18 am, and that Sunset was around 5:50-6:00 pm. The soldier's shadow length was estimated to be around 1.5-2 meters, and this length indicates that the video of the Rapid Support Forces celebration of entering and taking over the 21st Infantry Division was recorded between 2 o'clock to 4 o'clock in the afternoon.



Screenshot taken on 15/10/2024 by the verification team of Matmoora's Project from a video recording the entry of the Rapid Support Forces soldiers into the headquarters of 21st Infantry Division, it was published on 31/10/2023 by the Taha Wad Hanan page on X. The image above shows the Sun's and Moon's position on the dawn of the 31st of October 2023.





*Satellite image taken by the verification team of Matmoora's Project. The image shows shadow analysis of the photo from the video of the Rapid Support Forces entry into headquarters of 21st Infantry Division, where the shot shows comprehensive information about the time of the event according to the Sun's position on the 31st of October. The image indicates that sunrise was around 6:22 am and the first appearance of the Sun was around 6:23 am. We estimate that this corresponds to the time when the video and the two images above were captured.*

After midnight on October 30 -the time during which internally displaced persons of the camp heard that the 21st Infantry Division fell at the hands of the Rapid Support Forces- witnesses estimate that the artillery shells that were directed at the camp were no less than 200 artillery shells— that resulted in tens of deaths among the residents of the camp. And on the morning of October 31, the offensive on the camp started, where it was completely surrounded from all directions by four-wheel drive vehicles, motorbikes, and even horses which soldiers rode during the attack.



*Screenshot taken from a video published on 4/9/2024 by the page of the Rapid Support Forces on X platform showing the appearance of the four-wheel drive vehicles belonging to the Rapid Support Forces.*



*Screenshot taken from a video published on 31/10/2023 by the page of "Taha Wad Hanan" on X showing the similarities in appearance of the four-wheel drive vehicles of the Rapid support Forces in the image above and the vehicles of the Rapid Support Forces in this video. The vehicles in the different clips show that the video was recorded on the road leading to the 21st Infantry Division. The video lasts until the forces enter the 21st Infantry Division.*







Satellite images taken by the verification team of Matmoora's Project on 24/6/2024. The image shows the 21st Infantry Division road recorded in the video above.

Witnesses recount that the night was difficult due to the continuation of battles and artillery shelling, even that some of the internally displaced persons of the camp tried to flee from the camp at night. And in the morning, the camp was besieged from all directions by the Rapid Support Forces, after that soldiers entered the camp after tightening their grip on the 21st Infantry Division. Witnesses confirm that the soldiers wore the Rapid Support Forces uniform, and some of them wore civilian clothes and "kadmol"<sup>4</sup>

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4: A piece of cloth that covers the head and face worn by groups that move in different trading activities in the desert.



*Screenshot taken on 24/6/2024 by the verification team of Matmoora's Project showing Rapid Support Forces soldiers in official uniform and loyalist groups in civilian clothes inside the headquarters of the 21st Infantry Division in Zalengi on 31/10/2023.*

According to what witnesses recounted after the fall of the camp at the hands of the Rapid Support Forces, some soldiers of the Sudanese Army resorted to changing their military uniform and wearing civilian clothes, and after that entered the camp to blend in among civilians after escaping from the command of the 21st Infantry Division. Multiple crimes - during and after the military raid- happened against civilians which could potentially qualify as war crimes and crimes against humanity.



## Legal Analysis

After conducting interviews with 24 internally displaced witnesses and victims of the residents of al-Hasaheesa camp, the investigation determined a number of crimes that were committed during the attack by the Rapid Support Forces. This investigation examines the elements of the crimes, legal responsibility, assessment of the attack, legal classification of the crimes and the legal recommendations.

### Firstly: the legal framework

This analysis is based on the following legal references:

1. Article 7 (1) (d) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court: defines forced displacement as a crime against humanity.
2. International Humanitarian Law: includes principles of protecting civilians, specially the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols.
3. The first additional protocol of the Geneva Conventions of 1977: prohibits the indiscriminate shelling which does not distinguish between military and civilian targets.
4. Article 8 of the Rome Statute: is concerned with war crimes, including indiscriminate attacks and the intentional killing of civilians.
5. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols: prohibit the intentional killing of civilians.
6. Article 7 (1) (a) of the Rome Statute: defines murder as a crime against humanity.
7. Articles 7 (1) (g) and 8 of the Rome Statute: classify rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity.
8. Article 8 (2) (b) (ii) of the Rome Statute: defines large scale destruction of property without military necessity as a war crime.

9. The International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance: prohibits enforced disappearance and stipulates legal obligations related to disclosure of the fate of the arrested and the place of their detention.
10. Article 7 (1) (i) of the Rome Statute: defines enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity.
11. Sudanese Criminal Law of 1991: articles (186) crimes against humanity, (187) crimes of genocide, (188) war crimes.

All of these references are based on International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal Law and fall within the framework of protecting civilians and ensuring the prevention of human rights violations in armed conflicts.

## Secondly: Elements of the Crimes

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Witnesses recount that during the raid on the camp, the Rapid Support Forces were beating people and questioning them about the reason behind their stay up to that time. They then accused them of being loyal to the Sudanese army, claiming this was the real reason for their stay. Soldiers stress that they ordered residents to leave a long time ago, while witnesses recount that they had not left because they considered it their legitimate right to stay in the camp and did not know of any other place to go as an alternative:

*“We said that it was a bit difficult, for example, for the camp to be totally dismantled. The thing that made us stay is that we were saying if we left what would we do or take.”*

Later witnesses recounted that the Rapid Support Forces explicitly demanded that they leave the camp and directed them towards only one gate to exit through. Following that, it became clear that soldiers were standing at that gate and carrying out searches, stealing anything of value like phones, money and even clothes. It is worth mentioning that the camp was a refuge for thousands of families that were forced to leave through this single gate in extreme panic and fear.

The International Criminal Court defines forced displacement as the forced removal of individuals by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully

present, without grounds permitted under international law. And this is what is suspected to have happened in al-Hasaheesa camp at the hands of the Rapid Support Forces who evacuated the camp and pursued internally displaced persons on the road, shot at them and stole their possessions. And as is known, stealing and looting are patterns of the behaviour of the Rapid Support Forces that started since the moment of the offensive on the camp. The forces broke into the homes of internally displaced persons and stole their precious possessions at gunpoint. Anyone who resisted was immediately killed. One of the witnesses said:

*“The attack started by the Rapid Support Forces sieging the camp and preventing people from leaving, according to what I saw a number of the Rapid Support Forces surrounded the camp in all directions and it seems that a huge number entered into neighborhoods and inside homes, when they come and find you in your home they attack and hit you and expel you from your home and this is what happened to me personally, there were four people in the house they came and found us there and asked us what were we doing in the house and told us leave it. We previously told you, you do not want to leave? Are you with the army? You do not want to leave? All of you are soldiers! And we are just innocent citizens, they confiscated our phones and laptops.”*

And another spoke describing the attack and what happened on the way out:

*“No less than 500 people, I personally, on the way out from al-Hasaheesa camps until Zalingei city, in each and every street, found a huge number of Rapid Support Forces positioned forming gates. They search everything you have, they beat you and take it from you.”*

The victims wondered about the reason behind the continuation of these violations against them since the start of the Darfur conflict, and one of the witnesses noted the repeated displacement waves that the citizens of Darfur were subjected to since 2003 saying:

*“Every time I think about why this happened to us even though now we had 22 years of displacement, the first was in 2003, after 22 years this happened to us again, I mean there are psychological effects and there are a lot of people who die because of this, I mean one just always thinks about this, why, what did we do, why does this happen to us, I mean there are a lot of hardships.”*

According to article 7 (1) (d) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, forced displacement is considered a crime against humanity when protected persons are forcibly removed from the area in which they are lawfully present, either through expulsion or other coercive acts without legal grounds. In this context, forced

displacement is suspected to have occurred in al-Hasaheesa Camp. These acts clearly violate the principles of International Humanitarian Law that prohibit forced displacement of protected persons except in cases of military necessity.

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Citizens of al-Hasaheesa Camp endured -throughout the duration of the siege- renewed indiscriminate shelling by the Rapid Support Forces with different weapons of which are heavy artillery and drones, in addition to the indiscriminate firing of munitions towards the camp which led to tens of deaths of internally displaced persons including women and children. Witnesses recount that the process of burying bodies was difficult, and attempting it exposed them to the risk of being killed, because shelling and shooting continued for long periods, in addition to the risk of going outside the camp toward any cemetery; people were forced to bury their relatives inside their homes – a step that, despite its necessity, conflicted with Sudanese cultural practices of burial.

The pattern of indiscriminate shelling continued for a long period, one of the factors that contributed to its continuation is the camp's proximity to the command of the 21st Infantry Division Zalengi, making it caught in the crossfire of the Rapid Support Forces. According to statements of witnesses, the Rapid Support Forces soldiers assumed that the internally displaced persons in the camp were army loyalists -an accusation that was explicitly made against them during the offensive on the camp. Also, blame was placed on internally displaced persons for not leaving the camp before the attack, with the assumption that their stay to that time was because of their alliance with the army. And according to witnesses' statements, the numbers of deaths since the start of the war on April 15th until July 2023 is estimated around 180 deaths recorded by the local hospitals.

Indiscriminate shelling is considered a flagrant violation of the principle of distinction in International Humanitarian Law that requires warring parties to distinguish between military and civilian targets. The indiscriminate shelling through artillery and drones of al-Hasaheesa Camp represents a violation of the first additional protocol of the Geneva Conventions of 1977. What resulted from this indiscriminate shelling of deaths of women and children can be described as a war crime in accordance with article 8 of the Rome Statute, which prohibits indiscriminate attacks that can cause severe harm to civilians.

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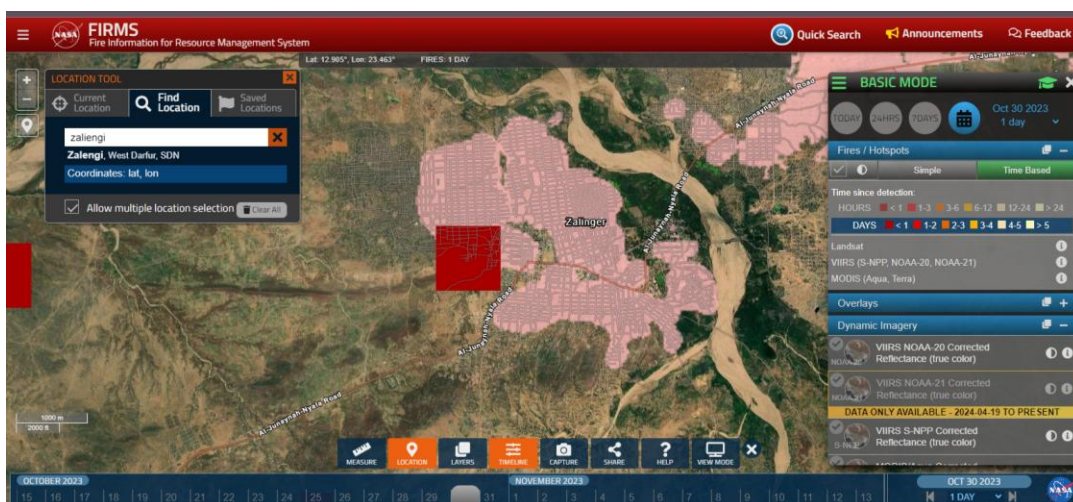
Witnesses recount that after the Rapid Support Forces stormed the camp, they killed and executed a number of citizens for different reasons. Among these reasons are accusations to some internally displaced persons of being members of the Sudanese Army or loyalists. Those forces killed a number of individuals who attempted to resist when their vehicles, money, mobile phones, or even clothing were being stolen.

Witnesses said that getting killed is one of the easiest things that can befall an individual, as even the slightest defiance or refusal to comply with soldiers' orders could result in immediate execution, not to mention the widespread killing of civilians through indiscriminate shooting on the camp during its siege, and later, in the displacement route internally displaced persons were pursued, subjected to harassment, looting, pillaging, killing and were shot at.

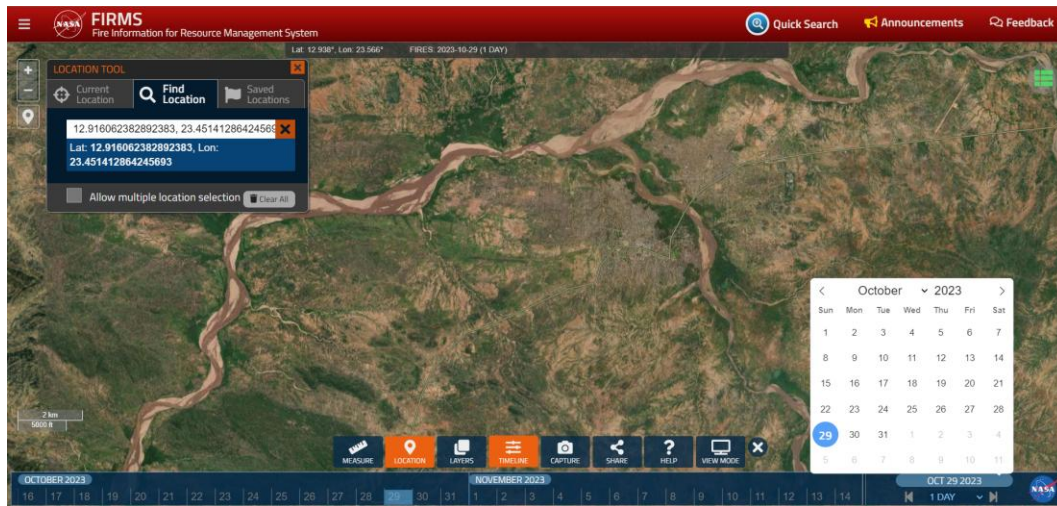
International Humanitarian Law as stipulated in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols, prohibits the intentional killing of civilians. Also the crime of intentional killing is considered a crime against humanity according to article 7 (1) (a) of the Rome Statute. Testimonies that refer to systematic killings carried out by the Rapid Support Forces against civilians, whether they were accused of supporting the Sudanese Army or in the context of stealing their possessions, fall within intentional killing which can be considered a crime against humanity and/or a war crime.

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One of the patterns that occurred during the offensive on the camp is the large-scale destruction of properties, where witnesses recounted that the Rapid Support Forces completely burned several homes after they looted and dismantled their parts, even doors, windows and roofs.







*Satellite image taken on 13/6/2024 from the website of NASA Firms showing the fire density index in Zalengei city in a number of areas in red, one of which appears South-East to the location of al-Hasaheesa Camp and close to the headquarters of the 21st Infantry Division on 30/10/2023 which lasted for a period ranging from 12 to 24 hours (the red color indicates a large fire that lasted for a period of not more than 24 hours). In the second image the fire density index of the color red disappears, the image shows the comparison before and after the fire in the location mentioned above.*

The intentional destruction of civilian properties -as documented in the camp- is considered a violation of the principle of protecting civilian property in armed conflicts. According to article 8 (2) (b) (ii) of the Rome Statute, the large-scale destruction of properties -without military grounds- is considered a war crime. Also the acts of breaking and looting are considered crimes prohibited by international law.

Witnesses recount that several youths were subjected to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance . And several recounted different stories about losing their relatives and not knowing where they were, as the Rapid Support Forces targeted youths and men in their prime with arrests, enforced disappearance and torture while repeating the accusation that they were members of the Sudanese Army.

Enforced disappearance is one of the patterns of the Rapid Support Forces' violations. It happened -and still happens- in different states in Sudan- specially the states in which the conflict started or later expanded to. This disappearance is associated with inhumane conditions of arrest, the detained are denied food and water and are subjected to constant harassment, torture and in some instances outright killing. One of the affiliates of the army who was subjected to arrest -one of those we interviewed - recounts that the

number of the detainees ranges between 200-500 detainees, with only 50 of them actually being members of the army.

In the case of women, they are generally subjected slavery and sexual slavery in particular. That includes forcing them to attend to soldiers and provide care work for them like cooking, cleaning, in addition to being sexually exploited. It is remarked that the pattern of sexual violations, is as well a recurring pattern in the violations of the Rapid Support Forces where one of the witnesses when asked about the possibility of sexual violence crimes occurring, said:

*"These things are rampant, I mean it goes without saying. Raping us is a normal thing according to these people."*

And another in speaking mentioned rape crimes, and the current form of authority in the state:

*"These are the same Rapid Support Forces, there's no one else. Everything they do—rapes, killings, and displacement—it's all them. There's no difference, it's all RSF... And now, they say we have a so-called government in the state. That's not a government, that's just misery. Honestly, we'll just have to wait and see what happens; may God make things easier for us."*

It is worth mentioning that the Rapid Support Forces attempted establishing different forms of government and authority – the witness alluded to it in the previous quote- in the states that it tightly controls. And another witness adds:

*"Honestly, even before the attack on the camp, cases of rape were happening. The situation forced people into dangerous circumstances—even though they knew that some individuals were being captured and raped, they would still take the risk because they had no choice. They had to go to the market to get vegetables or other necessities. And when they went, they would get arrested or detained in certain places for a night or two, sometimes three, before being released. In many of these cases, rape was evident."*

*But the problem is that our society is simple, and people don't openly admit to what happened to them. If someone experiences something like this, they won't come forward directly. Rapes were happening both before the attack on the camp and during the attack itself, along with many other violations. But because of the way people were raised—the traditions and customs—they'd rather stay silent. Instead of speaking up to seek justice, they fear the stigma of someone saying, 'Oh, so-and-so was raped.'"*

Enforced disappearance is considered a crime against humanity according to article 7 (1) (i) of the Rome Statute. What happened in al-Hasaheesa camp -from arrest or abduction of women, youths and men- is considered a serious violation of human rights. Also not disclosing the fates of the arrested or their places of detention, along with them being subjected to torture and sexual slavery, represent a violation of the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance of 2006. Enforced disappearance is associated with other violations like torture and extra-judicial killing, which increases the seriousness of the crime. Also, sexual violence in conflicts is considered a serious crime in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal Law. Rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence connected to armed conflict, are classified as war crimes and crimes against humanity according to the two articles 7 (1) (g) and 8 of the Rome Statute. The targeting of women through sexual violence during the conflict reinforces the systematic nature of these violations, which makes the Rapid Support Forces responsible for committing these crimes.

#### 6. Sudanese Criminal Law:

Sudanese Criminal Law of the year 1991 amendment of 2009 devoted Chapter 18 to "serious" crimes and international crimes on a broad scale. Although the amendments that were done were not sufficient, or the result of a natural legal evolution, but were political measures related to that stage, and hence the Evidence Act was not amended to keep up with the developments. In any case, the local law takes the statutory jurisdiction and considers international intervention an exception. The articles stipulated that:

- Article 186: crimes against humanity. The article included acts of deliberate killing of one or more persons, or imposing harsh living conditions with the intention of decimating the population, or imposing restrictions on the freedom of the population, or trafficking people especially women and children, or displacement and deportation of a person or a protected group of the population, or transferring them from the area in which they are lawfully present, or the imprisonment of a person or
- more or significantly depriving them of physical freedom in any form that violates the basic rules of international humanitarian law.
- Article 187: crimes of genocide. This article is entirely derived from the Rome Statute in terms of the definition and the basic foundations of the article. However, the

Sudanese law determined the maximum penalty for these to be execution, unlike what is established in the international system which does not apply the death penalty.

- Article 188: war crimes. It is also taken from the international humanitarian law, and defines them as violations that are committed by the warring parties in the context of an international or non-international armed conflict, like the killing of protected persons, or the torture of protected persons, or subjecting them to inhumane treatment with the purpose of punishing or intimidating or coercing them, or violating the dignity of a person or more, or the arrest of a person or more, or using coercion in sexual intercourse with a female or engaging in sexual acts with a male.

### Thirdly: Legal Responsibility

- Individual Criminal Responsibility: the leaders and members of the Rapid Support Forces involved in the attack on al-Hasaheesa camp are considered criminally responsible for the committed crimes in accordance with International Criminal Law.
- Command Responsibility: military commanders may be held accountable in accordance with the principle of "command responsibility" if it was proven that they gave the orders or did not take measures to prevent crimes and punish their perpetrators. According to the investigation and testimonies, the one who was in command in the incident of the offensive on al-Hasaheesa camp was commander Ali Yacoub.
- Criminal Intent: criminal intent is an essential element to determine the criminal responsibility of the Rapid Support Forces in the offensive on al-Hasaheesa camp. According to the presented testimonies and the available evidence, there seemed to be a clear intent to commit crimes against civilians, where the testimonies indicate that the Rapid Support Forces deliberately targeted internally displaced persons inside the camp for reasons related to their supposed support for the Sudanese Army. In crimes like forced displacement, intentional killing and sexual assault, criminal intent could be proved through the acts associated with the attack, like:
  - Forced displacement: the Rapid Support Forces were aware that internally displaced persons had the right to remain in the camp, and in spite of that, they compelled them to leave by force. Here the intent to use violence to force displacement is evident.

- Intentional Killing: the indiscriminate and intentional killing of civilians shows a pre-existing criminal intent, especially in light of the allegations that some civilians were being accused of being members of the Sudanese Army and executed on that basis.
- Sexual violence: also criminal intent is evident in the systematic sexual assaults against women, which shows that these crimes were part of a strategy to spread fear and assert control. Proving this intent indicates that these acts were not merely individual behaviors on the part of soldiers, but were part of a systematic campaign targeting the residents of the camp.

### **Fourthly: Assessment of the Attack**

It seems, according to testimonies, that the attack on al-Hasaheesa camp was systematic and deliberate against civilians and internally displaced persons. And the following elements permeate it:

- Violation of the principle of distinction in International Humanitarian Law: indiscriminate attacks on the camp, which caused the deaths of civilians without differentiating between military and civilian targets, are considered a flagrant violation of the principle of distinction.
- Violation of the principle of proportionality: the attack that led to the killing of civilians and the destruction of their properties shows an excessive use of force, which contradicts with the principle of proportionality stipulated in International Humanitarian Law.
- Forced displacement and looting: the mass expulsions and organized looting show that the attack did not only intend to control the camp, but rather terrorizing civilian residents and forcibly displacing them.

### **Fifthly: Legal Classification of the Crimes**

1. Crimes against humanity:
  - 1.1. Forced displacement (Article 7 (1) (d) of the Rome Statute).
  - 1.2. Intentional killing of civilians (Article 7 (1) (a)).
  - 1.3. Enforced disappearance (Article 7 (1) (i)).
  - 1.4. Rape and sexual violence (Article 7 (1) (g)).

## 2. War crimes:

- 2.1. Indiscriminate attacks (Article 8 of the Rome Statute).
- 2.2. Intentional killing (Article 8).
- 2.3. Destruction of property without military necessity (Article 8 (2) (b) (ii)).
- 2.4. Sexual violence and sexual slavery (Article 8).

## Sixthly: Pattern Analysis

- Temporal Pattern and Repeated Behaviour: Sieging displacement camps is a systematic tactic employed by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) against civilians in the Darfur region. There are previously documented incidents of this, for example the Morny Siege in West Darfur state in which the patterns of violations are similar such as restricting civilians freedom of movement. In most cases -before the war of April 15th 2023- the Rapid Support Forces forced the camp's residents to pay what they called "diyah" (blood money), claiming that the camp residents caused the death of one of their members or relatives without clear evidence or trials. And thus, camp leaders were forced to collect and pay a ransom to lift the siege.

What happened in al-Hasaheesa camp is considered to be slightly different from this pattern, where the goal of sieging the camp was related to taking over the area and establishing control over it, especially after taking over the 21st Infantry Division Zalengi. Also the siege of al-Hasaheesa Camp extended for several weeks during which crimes occurred that were previously mentioned in the characteristics of the siege.

One of the patterns of the Rapid Support Forces in war is conflict-related sexual violence, where several cases were recorded since the beginning of the conflict of Darfur in 2003 including after the war of April 15th which indicates the use of the Rapid Support Forces of rape as a weapon of war in different conflict-affected regions of Sudan.

Indiscriminate shelling which does not differentiate between military and civilian targets is as well considered one of the patterns of the Rapid Support Forces in wars, where it is currently repeated in North Darfur state where civilians are being killed by the hour, while a siege is being imposed on the entire state and constant attacks are carried out against it leading to



disastrous consequences on the security and stability of the state, making it one of the most difficult spots in Sudan to live in currently.

- **Perpetrator Analysis:** The Rapid Support Forces are considered a paramilitary force led by Mohamed Hamadan Daglo "Hemedti"- and one of the main parties of the April 15th war. These forces have a long history of violations in Darfur against civilians since the beginning of the crisis in the region in 2003. These forces evolved to become a huge and influential force in Sudan, it has a clear chain of command, and its members follow the orders of their highest commanders. The Rapid Support Forces are accused of committing a wide range of human rights violations during the conflict in Sudan, including killing, rape, sexual slavery, torture and forced displacement.
- **Victims Analysis:** The victims in the offensive on al-Hasaheesa camp in Central Darfur are considered to be all the internally displaced persons of the camp. Of the remarked patterns during the attack is the targeting of young age groups of men with physical assault and arrest. Targeting women with crimes of sexual violence connected to the conflict (like rape, sexual slavery and enforced disappearance) is another rampant pattern that uses rape as a weapon of war.

### **Seventh: legal recommendations**

1. **International Investigation:** The International Community, Human Rights Organizations, and the International Criminal Court must launch a full investigation into these crimes. Based on the existing evidence, those responsible for these violations should be held accountable in the context of international trials.
2. **Protection of internally displaced persons:** measures must be taken to protect internally displaced persons and ensure their safety in places of refuge, including protection from future attacks or potential threats.

3. Accountability of Perpetrators: military and civilian leaders involved in issuing orders or disregarding crimes should be presented to justice. Also any individual or party that participated in covering up these crimes should be punished.
4. Reparations for the victims: a mechanism must be established to provide compensations to the victims and their families for the severe damages they sustained due to the attack, including monetary compensation as well as social and psychological support.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

What the victims witnessed during the attack on al-Hasaheesa Camp (almost a year since it occurred) from severe violations of human rights, including forced displacement, indiscriminate shelling, intentional killing crimes, large scale destruction of properties, enforced disappearances and sexual violence, reflect the extent of the deterioration of humanitarian and security conditions in Sudan after the war of April 15th 2023. Civilians, specially women and children, endured increasing risks as a result of the continuation of the conflict, the first of which is represented in the coercion of residents to leave their homes and seek refuge in refugee camps in neighboring countries or displacement to safer areas, leaving behind their homes, properties, in addition to being subjected to systematic theft, looting and persecution on the way out of the camp - which made them victims of crimes against humanity and war crimes. The situation necessitates taking immediate measures on the part of the local, regional and international communities to protect civilians and provide urgent humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees and victims.

## Recommendations

1. Urgent humanitarian assistance: Immediate efforts must be made to provide food, medical supplies, clean water to those affected in the different areas that internally displaced persons sought refuge in or were displaced to again (for example, East Chad camps which host a significant number of victims who fled due to the escalation of conflict in Darfur). Refugees in East Chad camps endure deteriorating humanitarian conditions, and an acute shortage of food and medical care, and there is an urgent need for international organizations to intervene to ensure refugees receive food and humanitarian services, especially medical care for those sustaining direct injuries from artillery shelling and different assaults.
2. Protection Mechanisms: establishing strong protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups, specially women and children, including measures against gender-based sexual violence and ensuring the provision of specialized support to survivors of sexual violence, including medical and psychological support. It is necessary to trace the displacement route of the victims from the cities and states of Darfur and

analyze the security conditions in which refugees live, as a several claims were recorded of female refugees in East Chad camps being subjected to crimes of sexual violence, in addition to murder and safety threats. It is also necessary to establish mechanisms of protecting Sudanese refugees in the camps and monitoring security conditions.

3. Advocacy for Accountability: it is necessary to intensify advocacy efforts for accountability in the human rights violations that the residents of al-Hasaheesa camp were subjected to. It is imperative that the local, regional and international authorities work on urgently and precisely investigating these violations, and document testimonies of victims and witnesses to provide strong evidence. These authorities should be encouraged to take legal measures against the perpetrators, and ensure they are brought to justice, to ensure the International Community's commitment to protecting human rights and protecting vulnerable groups, and preventing impunity for perpetrators.



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